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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this project was to understand teachers' professional development by reconstructing their career experiences. The study examined the ways in which 10 experienced primary school teachers from 4 different Flemish schools experienced their careers, focusing on the personal perception and the subjective meaning of these experiences. Data were analyzed in two steps: (1) vertical analysis, which imposed a fixed structure to each teacher's data concerning formal career, professional biography, professional self, and subjective educational theory; and (2) horizontal analysis, which identified commonalities, differences, and patterns among the data from all respondents. The analysis examined teachers' self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, task perception, and future perspective. Recurring themes included teachers' perceived vulnerability and their need to cope with the limitations of their impact on pupils' results. The paper concludes that the study showed the usefulness of the biographical perspective for a better understanding of why teachers act the way they do. However, teachers' stimulated reflection on their career and personal development did not automatically change or improve their teaching practice. (Contains 51 references.) (JDD)

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A TEACHER IS A TEACHER IS A TEACHER IS A...
Teachers' Professional development from a biographical perspective

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Atlanta, April 12-16, 1993.

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers develop throughout their career. Their professional behaviour as a team member and a classroom teacher undergoes qualitative changes. This is described as "professional development", a frequently used notion with an intuïtive definition. But when one tries to formulate a more explicit definition or to distinguish between the descriptive and the often implicit normative connotation, the notion proves to be rather "foggy". In this paper we explore and analyse professional development from the socalled "**biographical perspective**" (Kelchtermans, 1993). The central idea in this research approach -that is adopted by a growing number of educationalists lately (see e.g. Goodson, 1992; Sikes, Measor & Woods, 1985; also Kelchtermans, forthcoming)- is: a teacher's professional behaviour can only be understood properly when it is conceived of as a moment in a life long process of learning and development. People have their own life history. Experiences in the past, intentions and expectations towards the future determine the actual behaviour. In teaching past, present and future are complexely interwoven.

THE BIOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

As a theoretical approach the biographical perspective is characterized by five general features: it is narrative, constructivistic, contextualistic, interactionistic and dynamic. *Narrative* (see e.g. Fischer, 1984; Little, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988) refers to the emphasis on the subjective, narrative form in which teachers present their career experiences. The professional experiences are organized in an "autobiographic story". This implies that the biographical approach not so much focuses on the facts, but rather on the meaning these facts and experiences have for the respondent. This interpretative element, as well as the narrative structure of the data (= recalled experiences) constitute the core element of the narrative discours.
The approach is also *constructivistic* (see e.g. Berger & Luckmann, 1985; Bruner, 1986; Gergen & Gergen, 1987; Markus & Wurf, 1987): the respondent actively construes his career experiences into a story that is meaningful to him. Also his conception about teaching and of himself as a teacher are "construed" meanings.
Story always implies *context* (Siegert & Chapman, 1987): in the narrative discourse events are always presented in their context. By context we mean the physical, institutional environment of the school, as well as the social, cultural and intrapersonal "Lebenswelt".
The contextualistic element is important because we also take an *interactionistic* stance (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1974; Nias, 1989b). Human behaviour always results from a meaningful interaction with the enviroment or context (social, cultural, material, institutional). This is closely connected to the constructivist element: meanings are construed throughout the interaction with the environment. Especially the social (the other actors) and the cultural environment (opinions, the school culture -see Staessens, in press) play an important role. This way we avoid a conceptualisation of professional behaviour that is too cognitivistic, as well as an approach that is too subjectivistic (only looking at what happens "inside" the teacher).
The *dynamic* aspect finally (Gergen & Gergen, 1987; Markus & Wurf, 1987) emphasizes another core element in the biographical approach: the temporal dimension and the developmental dynamic. Teachers' actual thinking and acting constitutes one moment, a fragment in a continuous process of assigning meaning to the perceived and experienced reality. Our interest in the professional environment involves also the temporal dimension of that context. The biographical perspective conceives of context in a spacial and temporal sense.

These five features constitute the core of the biographical perspective. Conceived of this way we believe that the biographical perspective allows a comprehensive and in-depth approach of teachers' professional development.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS, PROCEDURE AND PRELIMINARY CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This paper reports on the main study of a research project, entitled "The professional biography of primary school teachers". The main study was preceeded by an extensive exploration of the literature (Anglo-Saxon, French and German; see Kelchtermans, 1990a; Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1990) and two pilot studies (De Jaegher & Indenkleef, 1990; Kelchtermans, forthcoming; Van Den Branden, 1991). In this project the main aim was to understand teachers' professional development by reconstructing their career experiences. According to the biographical perspective as characterized above, we were interested in the way teachers themselves experience their careers. In our study we explicitely focused on the personal perception and the subjective meaning of these experiences by the teachers. We therefore used the notion **"professional biography or career story"** instead of the (formal) "career", to refer to the way the teacher retrospectively reconstructs his career experiences as a story. In this story the facts, situations and experiences are presented in their subjective meaning for the teacher and organized into a personally meaningful "Gestalt" (see a.o. Berk, 1980, p.94; Bahrdt, 1982, p.24-27).

The study of the literature and the two pilot studies resulted in a preliminary conceptual framework and a research procedure.
According to the "grounded-theory"-approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Wester, 1987) the **conceptual framework** was conceived of as a set of "sensitizing concepts". The tentative definitions of these concepts were specified and refined during the study (especially during the continuing analysis of the data). In the pilot studies (and the exploration of the research literature) we found evidence that teachers during their career develop a **professional self**, a personal conception of oneself as a teacher and a **subjective educational theory**, a personal system of knowledge and beliefs about their job. In our study we aimed at reconstructing the professional self and the subjective educational theory from the career stories. Self and subjective educational theory were conceived of as valid indicators of the professional development. The central research question then was: *Can we understand teachers' professional development by reconstructing the career stories? Indicators for the professional development are professional self and subjective educational theory.*

For the reconstruction of the career stories a **research procedure** was developed in which several research techniques were combined: a career questionnaire (reconstruction of the formal career), biographical interviews, logs, classroom and school observations. A **cycle of three semi-structured biographical interviews** was the main research technique. The interviews aimed at stimulating teachers to reflect back on their career experiences and to tell their career stories. We labeled this process "stimulated autobiographical selfthematisation". The research procedure was cumulative: it contained different steps in the data collection, that builded on each other. Every step was preceeded by and based on an interpretive analysis of the data already collected. The data collected with one technique were used to analyse other data (triangulation).
The entire procedure was described in detail in a **research scenario** (Kelchtermans, 1990b). Between May 1990 and July 1991 we studied ten experienced Primary School Teachers (between 15 and 25 years of classroom experience) from four different Flemish schools. We selected at least two teachers from the same school, to have an extra source for data triangulation. Four female and six male respondents participated in the main study. Apart from the research scenario we also used a **researcher's log** to document the actual research process. This log also was a means for a systematic reflection by the researcher (controling for reseacher effects).

The data were **analysed** in two steps. The **vertical analysis** can be described as a chain of interpretive transformations of the data during the collection process (the analyses between the steps in the data collection), and resulted in a synthesis text, that was fed back to the respondent for communicative validation during the final interview. In this text the complete set of data and tentative interpretations by the researcher were organised around a fixed structure. This structure reflects the different levels of interpretation in our conceptual framework: formal career, professional biography, professional self and subjective educational theory (see Figure 1). These levels constitute an ongoing movement from facts to analytical interpretation. After validation by the respondent, we got a final synthesis text that included all relevant data. This text was called the **"Professional Biographical Profile"**. And since its structure, reflecting the conceptual framework, was common to all respondents, we used it as a basis for our second step, the **horizontal analysis.** In the vertical analysis we concentrated on the internal coherence and consistency of the individual teacher's story. In the horizontal analysis we compared systematically the Professional Biographical Profiles of all the respondents, looking for commonalities, remarkable differences, recurring patterns and so on.
In the rest of the paper we will present the results of the analysis (vertical as well as horizontal). That

presentation will also follow the lines of the conceptual framework (see figure 1). It will clarify and illustrate -by using fragments of the Professional Biographical Profiles- the notions of our developing conceptual framework. Finally we will summarize the major findings of the horizontal analysis.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL BIOGRAPHIES

The formal career

The life time teachers spend on teaching can be organised into a so-called "**formal career**", a chronological chain of positions, roles, etc. a teacher is involved in during his teaching years. This "actual" career in our study functions as a "skeleton". The career story (the "subjective career") will give "flesh and blood" to it. Hereafter one finds the formal careers of Leo and a colleague from his school (Luke). Their formal careers give a first, global overview of their professional lives.

"The Lark" is a primary school in a rural village, less then 10 km away from Province Capital. It has been a gender-mixed school for five years, when the school for boys and the one for girls were merged. Several members of the school team are related through kinship (e.g. the school leader's niece; mother and daughter; at the start of Luke's career his father and uncle were teaching at the Lark; Luke's wife works as a secretary in the school). Most team members (Luke not!) have had one or more conflicts with the local school board, i.e. with the parish priest who is the board's president. This man uses to intervene very directly and purposively in school matters (e.g. the allocation of teachers and grades). Because of an enduring conflict with him, the previous school leader, who was highly valued and respected by the school team, resigned and left the school.

LEO:
- *born in 1951*
- *1963-1970: Secondary School and Teacher Training College in City;*
- *September 1970 - January 1972: interim-jobs in R.(grade 2) and A. (grade 2)*
- *January 1972-January 1973: military service (compulsory)*
- *January 1973-June 1973: three interim-jobs, in H. (grade 2), in A. and in ST (grade 4 and 5)*
- *September 1973-1974: one year in He. (grade 1);*
- *June 1974: marriage*
- *September 1974-June 1977: remedial teacher at the Lark*
  - *. November 1976: Daughter K. is born*
  - *. 1976-1978: Intensive Inservice-Training (Higher Educational Institute)*
- *September 1977-June 1985: grade 3 in the Lark (Boys School)*
  - *. training as librarian 1978-1979*
  - *. lifelong assignment: September 1979*
  - *. 1979-1989: free lance journalist (Book Reviews) for Newspaper*
  - *. April 1983: Daughter E. is born*
- *September 1985 - now: grade 1 in the Lark (Girls School; mixed since 1986)*
  - *. October 1989-June 1990: in-service trainer (Language) . January 1991-January 1992: idem*

LUKE:
- ** 1955; father was Primary School Teacher in the Lark; brother is also a teacher;*
- *1973-1976 Teacher Training College (3 1/2 year to finish the one year program!) in City*
- *January - May 1977: four short interim jobs, the last one of three months in the Lark (grade 5);*
- *June 1977-June 1979: part-time teacher in D. (grade 3 and 4)*
- *April - November 1978: Military Service (compulsary)*
- *December 1978-June 1979: in the Lark (Boys School; grade 4; his father's former grade);*
- *July 1979: marriage*
- *September 1979 - now: the Lark (Girls School; grade 3; mixed school since 1986)*
  - *. October 1980: Son W. is born*
  - *. September 1981: Daughter L. is born.*
  - *. lifelong assignment: 1982*
  - *. since 1986: trade union representative in the Lark*
  - *. wife works as secretary in the Lark*

The formal careers of both respondents, although only presented synoptically, already reveal a number of important issues.

Leo is a teacher with very diverse professional expertises and experiences. He has taught almost all Primary School grades, worked as a remedial teacher and as an in-service-trainer. He also is librarian, worked as free lance journalist and writes poetry and books for children. When confronted with new job demands or tasks, he uses to look for further professionalisation through in-service training (Higher Educational Institute, courses on learning difficulties and on working with groups). It is also remarkable that he had to wait quite long before getting a lifelong assignment (see below).
Luke's career clearly shows a different pattern. He had difficulties getting his teachers' certificate (it took almost twice the normal study time). After a short period of interims, he could take over his father's class, who left school to give his son the job. It was a planned scenario. Luke had and has relatives in the schoolteam (father, oncle and wife). In the Lark he had to change grade only once, but then he could stay in grade 3. Since four years he represents the teachers' trade union in the school and is engaged in the board of the local Volley Ball Club; his wife is one of the players.

The formal careers show that for both respondents -although colleagues in the same school- the career pattern (the subsequent positions in the job), as well as their personal engagement in the job (e.g. willingness to do in-service training) differ to a great extent. These formal data get a richer meaning when embedded in the career story.

The professional biography: a story around critical incidents, phases and persons

Higher we defined professional biography or career story as the retrospective and narrative reconstruction of the career by the respondent, in which his professional experiences are reconstructed in a meaningful "Gestalt". In this story certain events, phases or persons function as "turning points". Sikes et al. use the notions "**critical incident and critical phase**" (Sikes et al., 1985; Measor, 1985). They define critical incidents as "key events in an individual's life, and around which pivotal decisions revolve. They provoke the individual into selecting particular kinds of actions, which lead in particular directions" (Sikes et al., 1985, p.57). The teacher's self conception and his routine professional behaviour loose (at least to some extent) their self evidence and are questioned. The teacher feels forced to change his routine behaviour, to make decisions that will influence (the development of) his future professional behaviour. In a career there are certain periods in which critical incidents are more likely to occur, since they constitute specific challenges for the teacher. Measor describes the relationship between critical incidents and phases as follows: "It is during these periods of changing and choosing that critical incidents are most likely to occur. The incident itself probably represents the culmination of a decision-making process, cristallizing the individual's thinking, rather than being responsible of itself for that decision" (Measor, 1985, p.62).
An important completion to critical incidents and phases -that is only present very implicitly in the work of Sikes et al. (1985) and Measor (1985)- are "**critical persons**". During the pilot study we found that respondents very often referred to other persons who were perceived as having had an important impact on the development of the respondents career and selfunderstanding as a teacher (see Kelchtermans, forthcoming; Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1993).

Two criteria were used in the analysis for an event, person or phase to be considered as "critical":
(1) the respondent refers to the event as a very meaningfull situation (expressions as "that was very important to me"; "I never forgot how miserable I felt then..."). The fact that the respondent himself retrieves this situation from his memory and presents it as a meaningful event, already is a clear indication for its importance. An event is also critical when the researchers' interpretation of an event as critical is confirmed by the respondent. In his analysis and interpretation of critical incidents, the researcher also uses (apart from the content of the narrative) para- or nonverbal behaviours of the respondent during the interview (intonation, emphasis, mimic, gesticulation) or formal aspects of the narrative (overload of details, striking pauzes or changes in the story's pace, abrupt endings, etc.);

(2) when the meaningfulness of the incident is linked to the own professional behaviour. This will become clear in the specific description and interpretation of the event.

In an analogue way, critical persons and critical phases were identified. In the latter case, we do not refer to

specific events, but to a certain period of time, that is described by the respondent as very meaningfull for his professional thinking and behaving.

An example from Leo's career story illustrates this. Leo has been a remedial teacher for three years. Because the job of remedial teacher in Primary Schools was relatively new at that time and because he soon realized that his knowledge about learning problems and remedial teaching was insufficient, he decided to take a three-year in-service course on learning difficulties. Through this course and through the informal meetings with colleagues he got acquainted with remedial teachers from other schools in an atmosphere of dynamism and commitment. Leo is enthousiastic when recalling those years of trying, studying, exchange with colleagues...It was "a wonderful period" (I16) and a "heroic period" (I15) too. Those times gave him great personal satisfaction and stimulated him in his job. At the same time it gave him a new perspective as a teacher: "I was determined to be a remedial teacher for the rest of my life" and I was prepared to "engage myself very far in this specialisation" (I17). The authenticity of his commitment becomes evident from the fact that the in-service course, that took place every wednesday afternoon and saturday morning during three years, costed him a whole lot of his leisure time. Not to mention his personal study time. But he was really "fascinated by the domain of learning problems and (...) I was prepared to engage myself very far in it."(I18).
This euphorical period however was abruptely terminated in 1977 when the schoolboard (with the parish priest as chair) decided to put Leo in grade 3 and to appoint as remedial teacher a colleague, who had difficulties (for reasons of personal health) to manage a group of pupils. This event ruined Leo's perspective as remedial teacher. Fortunately the pupils in grade 3 were a motived and pleasant group to work with. But the classroom was an old, ugly and unpleasant room and Leo absolutely disliked it ("I couldn't work in such a place"). Because the school board had suggested that he was to stay in that grade and that classroom, Leo wanted to renovate it. With some "artistic friends" (I22) he worked a couple of weeks to repaint the entire class, gave it a blue cieling with white clouds and rainbows etc. But after two years Leo once again was removed to grade 3 in the Boys School. He didn't only loose his favorite classroom, but came into a room that was even worse than the former one. The colleague who's class was taken over by Leo had had a nervous breakdown after having been incapable to run the grade for some months. "I arrived in a real piggery (...) that made things still worse. It was unbelieveble" (I21). Because Leo at that time still hadn't got his lifelong assignment yet (the school board twice had preferred a colleague when there was an occasion for such an appointment), Leo couldn't do anything against this decisions.
The years in grade 3 (from 1977 till 1985) are described by Leo as a "career break down": he taught without any commitment or enthousiasm and tried to cope with the desillusion by doing things outside school (training for librarian; free lance journalist in Newspaper).

In this example the concepts of critical incident, person and phase are clearly illustrated. The period as remedial teacher and the one in grade 3 are examples of critical phases for Leo. They had an important impact (positive and negative) on his professional commitment and job satisfaction. At the same time the chair of the schoolboard is an illustration of a negative critical person: his decisions directly influenced Leo's professional behaviour. First he ruined his perspective as remedial teacher and then he took away the renovated classroom. The renovation of this classroom was an element of Leo's coping process with the desillustion about the forced changes in his job. In Leo's story, the classroom becomes the symbol for his efforts to cope with the situation and to give a new perspective to his job. The fact that he didn't feel well in the situation (the lost job perspective) is symbolically represented and at a symbolical level (partly) transcended by turning the unpleasant room into a stimulating, good looking environment. This interpretation makes it possible for the listener/reader to realise the personal tragedy of Leo's last change in classroom. Metaphorically one could say: even the hardly recovered feeling of "being at home" in his job as teacher, is destroyed by literally putting him "out of the house" (the preferred and creatively arranged room). Only from this symbolic-biographical background the personal meaning and the impact of this experience can be understood properly.
The fragment also shows how the narrative approach is able to cover the complex interplay of personal experiences and expectations of a teacher, his professional behaviour and the organisational context. It became clear how fatal certain decisions (always exponent of the local power relations) in that organisational context can be for the individual professional perspectives of teachers.
It is important to remark that the identification of critical incidents, persons and phases as such is done retrospectively. Only afterwards the teacher clearly realises the scope of the experience and attributes a significant meaning to it. Beynon argues that teachers organise their career stories around these key experiences (Beynon, 1985, p.165). We used the notions in the first place as *heuristic concepts*, namely as tools in the retrospective search for a meaningful coherence in the career experiences.

When comparing the career stories of our respondents, we found evidence for the distinction by Sikes et al. (1985, p.57-58) between extrinsic, intrinsic and personal **critical phases**. *Extrinsic critical phases* are caused by external circumstances (e.g. the end of his job as remedial teacher for Leo). *Intrinsic critical phases* are inherent to the teaching career. A very clear example of this is the induction period (see further) when the teacher is confronted with the complex and demanding professional reality (praxis shock). *Personal critical phases* finally were determined by periods of fysical and mental break-downs or by the experience of parenthood. Becoming themselves a father or mother is a very meaningful and strong experience for most teachers, that also influences their professional behaviour (see below).

The analysis of the career stories further showed that **the critical incidents** we identified always had to do with events that made the teacher doubt his own professional competence (e.g. feeling unable to properly teach children with learning difficulties or to establish a relationship of thrust with some pupils) or with the decrease in social status of the teaching profession (e.g. disapproving reactions or lack of respect by parents). Some respondents also mentioned strong emotional events, such as the loss of beloved persons, that influenced their professional behaviour (e.g. realizing that life is short and that there is more in life then just working).
The **critical persons** mentioned were people that had functioned as a positive or negative role model for the teacher: they had influenced the opportunities for personal development (e.g. lecturers in teachers' college) or they personified a respected and valued teacher (social status) or they were highly regarded for their teaching or relational qualities (e.g. school leaders and older colleagues).

The notions critical incident, person and phase did not only prove usefull as heuristic tools in analyzing the career stories. They can also be considered as *theoretical concepts*, namely referring to events, persons or periods that are perceived by the teacher as having a specific and clear impact on the development of his professional behaviour, his professional self and subjective educational theory (see further). This definition is a formal one: the critical character depends on the subjective meaning that is attributed by the teacher. The specific content of a critical incident, phase or person therefore can strongly differ among teachers and has to be understood from the entire career story.

Themes and commonalities in the career stories

Several authors have distinguished different phases in a teaching career (Sikes et al., 1985; Hirsch et al., 1990; Huberman, Grounauer & Marti, 1989). Although we did not explicitly look for phases, there were several "moments" that recurred in the different career stories (apart from critical phases): the decision to start teacher education, the years in teacher's college, the induction (first years in practice) and the rest of the career. For most of the respondents the **decision to start teacher education** was not a clear and deliberate choice for a job as teacher. Most of the time the parents made that choice or there were "circumstances" that resulted in this decision (e.g. a former teacher suggested teacher education and the parents followed the suggestion; the visit of teacher educators "recruiting" students for their college...). For the female teachers a strong factor was the public opinion about teaching as a socially acceptable and suited job for women. For most of the respondents becoming a teacher implied a social promotion, when compared to the profession of their parents. More important than the decisive factors is the fact that only one male and only two female respondents started their teacher education with a clear view of what it was they were studying for. This is remarkable since a teachers' certificate for Primary Schools in Belgium leaves very few alternative job possibilities open.
Most of the respondents started to construct their "idea of the teaching job" during the time in teachers' college. That **time in teachers' college** was remembered as rather positive, except for two respondents who had difficulties passing the final exams (see above Luke). These negative experiences determined strongly their **induction phase**. For all the respondents these first years of teaching were dominated by the concerns for job stability and for gaining professional competence. The latter being more prominent when the teacher had difficulties in passing the final exams in college. For them the induction years were also the time of refinding confidence and building a positive self-esteem. But for all the respondents the induction phase meant struggles to cope with the complex and multiple expectations of the job and the gaps in their professional knowledge. These concerns became very clear in the central importance of getting a *"lifelong assignment"*.[1] This lifelong assignment implied a formal stabilisation of the job situation. When appointed to a job, it is almost impossible

[1] In Belgium all teachers are statutory civil servants: once they get a lifelong assignment it is almost impossible to fire them or to force them to choose another school. The assignment implies formal job stability.

to remove a teacher from school. It is also a general custom that a teacher gets a grade and stays in it for almost the rest of his career (unless he asks for a change himself of is forced to by circumstances, e.g. merger of two schools). Furthermore the lifelong assignment by the school board also constitutes a formal recognition of one's professional competence. When this assignment took more time then perceived normal as, this had a very negative impact on the teacher's jobsatisfaction and motivation, since without that appointment a teacher is rather powerless to all the decisions of the school board (e.g. yearly changes of grade; job insecurity and so on, as was illustrated by Leo's story.

Apart from this lifelong assignment the induction phase was also determined by the quality of the relations with colleagues in school (e.g. acceptance in the team; mutual help...), by the succesfull resolution of certain problems (e.g. authority in the classroom; managing differences in ability among the pupils) and a global experience of succes.

For some of the teachers the induction phase functioned as a *"professional moratorium"*: being in the job as a teacher, but without the full weight of all the responsabilities for a certain grade. This moratorium appeared in two variants. In the first the teacher got a job in a school, but not as full-time classroom teacher. The other variant was constituted by a series of short "interim jobs" in different schools during the first years of the career. Because he always stayed in a school for a relative short period of time, the teacher could gather experience in the job in a noncommittal way. When having problems with pupils or colleagues etc. it never took very long before he could start elswhere with a clean slate. This way it was easier to learn from mistakes...The career stories also revealed that the "critical" character of the induction period (intrinsic critical phase) was much less when this period was experienced as a professional moratorium.

As Huberman et al. correctly observed (Huberman et al., 1989, p.310), in contrast with the induction phase, the **later career phases** are much less studied, especially when one is interested in teachers' subjective experience of the job. Therefore we also analysed these phases in the career stories. We did so in terms of (lack of) **"career dynamics"**, namely changes in school or in the grade thaught. Five respondents stayed in the same grade in the same school after their lifelong assignment. The other half of the group experienced career dynamics. For three of them the change was externally imposed, e.g. by mergers of schools: these operations forced them to changes they wouldn't have made voluntarily themselves. This way these mergers constituted extrinsic critical phases for the teachers.

Only two respondents told about deliberate changes in their job situation, e.g. by choosing a higer grade (older children) or by accepting a job as remedial-teacher or in-service trainer (Leo). This finding is consistent with Huberman et al.'s observation that the induction phase results in a "stabilisation phase" (Huberman et al., 1989, p.143; also Hirsch et al., 1990, p.86-87). For most of the teachers their career development ends there. The quest for a stabile job situation and the energy with which this status quo is defended is striking. But there is more (and this shows the advantages of a narrative approach). By striving for a status quo, teachers open possibilities for what Nias has called "parallel careers" (Nias, 1989a, p.399). All but one respondents developed other "careers" parallel to their careers as teachers. The four female teachers had their family as a parallel job: raising children, doing the household etc.. The traditional genderbased patterns show up here. Five male teachers had parallel careers in "leisure activities": board members of a local sport club, playing jazz music and organising festivals, free lance work as journalist (see above Leo) etc.. These activities, that are done with much motivation and that give a lot of satisfaction, become (and remain) possible as long as the job situation of the teacher remains stabile. This explains (at least partly) the strive for status quo in the job. In their stories those teachers emphasize that the activities with and among adults are a compensation for the daily work with young children. In these parallel careers teachers can develop other competencies then teaching or can get a certain social status. This latter is important since all male respondents report a decrease in social standing of their profession. The only male respondent without a parallel career is the one who is most of all frustrated by this decraese in prestige of the job and the lack of chances for promotion. The phenomenon of the parallel careers also explains why the lack of job dynamics is experienced as positive most of the time and the externally imposed changes as negative. It confirms what McLaughlin and Yee observed, "Teachers (...), conceive of career and define career satisfaction largely in subjective terms (...) teachers generate an *expertise-based, individually determined* notion of career; advancement is framed in terms of an ongoing process of professional growth, and succes means effectiveness in the teaching role. (...) Their careers are individually constructed and experienced" (McLaughlin & Yee, 1988, p.26, their italics).

THE PROFESSIONAL SELF

Several authors emphasize the central role of teachers' self-representations for their professional behaviour (e.g. Ball & Goodson, 1985; Hirsch et al., 1990; Nias, 1989b). Nias observed that teachers, when talking about their job, actually constantly speak about themselves. She calls this: "persistent selfreferentialism" (Nias, 1989b, p.5),

"the teacher as a person is held by many within the profession and outside it to be at the centre of not only the classroom but also the educational process. By implication, therefore, it matters to teachers themselves, as well as to their pupils, who and what they are. Their self-image is more important to them as practitioners than is the case in occupations where the person can easily be separated from the craft" (Nias, 1989b, p.202-203).
After analysing the global career stories, we focused on the "professional selves" of the teachers, as they appeared in the career stories, and analysed them comparatively. *How do teachers conceive of themselves as teachers?* The answer to that question is not a static one, but evolves over time. It results from the continuous interaction between the teacher and his professional environment. In this analysis the concepts critical incident, phase and person proved again very usefull to understand the development of the professional self. We refer again to the example above: the school board's decision destroyed Leo's professional self as a remedial teacher. This also illustrates that the self is the product of the interaction with the environment and that professional self involves more than just an idiosyncratic construction by the teacher -although the subjective perception is of central importance. The school board forced Leo to construct another professional self, namely as teacher of grade 3 and thus no longer as the local specialist in diagnosis and remediation of learning problems. Further it will become clear that the professional self is to a great extent ascribed by others.
Aknowledging the central idea of the interwovenness of present, past and future in the biographical perspective and the multidimensionality in recent theories about the selfconcept[2], we distinguished a retrospective and a prospective dimension in the professional self (as it was reconstructed from the career stories).[3] Figure 2 gives an overview. The retrospective dimension refers to conceptions about the self as they appear if one looks back from the present to the past. This dimension is further distinguished in a descriptive, evaluative, conative and normative component that correspond respectively with the self image, the self esteem, the job motivation and the task perception. The prospective dimension becomes clear when one looks ahead to the future from the present. This corresponds with the future perspective.

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

The **self image** is the global characterisation of oneself as is revealed by self-*descriptive* statements. How does the teacher describe himself as a teacher? The career stories showed that this selfdescription often is formulated in terms of the general principles that govern the teachers' professional behaviour [4]. E.g. Miel says: *"I don't easy label children. I give them the chance to explore, I offer opportunities and the children get the chance*

[2] Markus and Wurf emphasize that the selfconcept is not a monolithical unity, but rather a collection of different types of selfrepresentations (Markus & Wurf, 1987, p.301). Siegert and Chapman add to this the temporal dimension. People define themselves not only in terms of their actual life situation and the way they experience it. At the same time they look back to whom they have been in the past en who they could be in the future. The authors state that the temporal dimension in the self understanding strongly determines the perception and the actual process of personal development (Siegert & Chapman, 1987, p.144). In another article Markus and Nurius talk about "possible selves", namely "the cognitive manifestations of enduring goals, aspirations, motives, fears, and threats" (Markus & Nurius, 1987, p.158). Since one never has access to the complete set or representations of oneself, Markus and Wurf use the term "working self-concept" or "self-concept of the moment", understood as "a continually active, shifting array of accessible self-knowledge" (Markus & Wurf, 1987, p.306). These authors also make a link with the biographical perspective (and its narrative basis), when they state that people combine their different selfrepresentations in a "current autobiography", "a story that makes the most coherent or harmonious integration of one's various experiences" (Markus & Wurf, 1987, p.316). Polkinghorne, emphasizing and advocating narrativity, writes: "(...) we achieve our personal identities and self concept through the use of the narrative configuration, and make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story. We are in the middle of our stories and cannot be sure how they will end; we are constantly having to revise the plot as new events are added to our lives. Self, then, is not a static thing nor a substance, but a configuring of personal events into a historical unity which includes not only what one has been but also anticipations of what one will be" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p.150). Our distinction between retrospective and prospective dimension, grounded in the career stories, is in accordance with these views.

[3] In accordance with the grounded-theory-approach and the idea of sensitizing concepts, the dimensions we distinguish in the professional self are a revision of those that resulted out of the pilot study (Kelchtermans, forthcoming; Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1993): self image, self esteem, job motivation, job satisfaction, task perception and future perspective were described as components of the professional self. The data of the main study didn't allow a sufficiently distinctive definition of "job satisfaction". Satisfaction is a very general indicator of the way teachers experience their job, rather than a component of the professional self. It proved very hard to distinguish the data that referred to job motivation or to self esteem, from those referring to job satisfaction. Since we wanted to develop notions that were conceptually differentiated and grounded in the data as well, we dropped the component job satisfaction. The dimensions and their components are conceptual differentiations of the general notion professional self. In reality they overlap to some extent, since they actually constitute different emphases to interpret and describe the same reality (= conceptions about oneself as a teacher).

[4] This also illustrates already the interwovenness of professional self and subjective educational theory in the career stories!

to make something out of it." Very often respondents also refer to the way they think they are perceived by others (colleagues, school leader, parents). Luke says e.g.: *"You're jugded by the people (...) the extern world, the parents, they come and tell you who you actually are...".* Or they compare themselves with those others: *"when I see someone acting more firmly towards the kids in a moment that I don't, I feel I should be more demanding: make them enter silently or be more quiet. But on the other hand, when I see Colleague being jovial to a pupil, I often hate myself for being so severe."(Nadine).*

Closely connected to the descriptive self image, the **self esteem**, refers to the *evaluation of oneself as a teacher.* How good am I as a teacher? In our study almost all respondents reported a rather positive self esteem. In the analysis we also looked for the determinants of this self esteem. The pupils are the most important factor, by their school results as well as by the quality of the personal relationship with the teacher. A relationship of personal confidence with the pupils is seen by many respondents as an indication of good professional performance. Nicole has a strong positive self esteem, *"because the kids usually come and visit me for several years after they've left primary school, to show me their school reports and so. Well, I think that proves something, doesn't it? ...and also the inspectors and my school leaders, they've always been satisfied with my work...so I think it's okay when I feel satisfied myself, isn't it? (laughs)".* One could also define the self esteem as the result of balancing the self image (self-description) and the implicit professional norms the teacher uses. This is the normative element of the task perception (see below). The judgement by others once again plays an important role in this balancing of ideal and reality. If the result of this balance is negative, it will cause demotivation.

Self esteem thus is also related to the **job motivation**: the motives someone has to choose the teacher job, to stay in the job or to leave it. We also looked for the evolution of this conative dimension throughout the career. Three respondents report a clear decrease in their job motivation, two others emphasize that is it still very high. Two other male respondents think that their job motivation is still quite high, but they expect a firm decrease in the future. Decraese in motivation has to do with the increasing demands teachers experience during the years (extra teaching-activities; team meetings; innovations to implement and so on) with the routine character of their job, but above all with the decrease in social status. This is a recurring theme, especially in the career stories of the male teachers. Marcel: *"Yes, and in society, your position as a teacher has become worse and worse. People don't respect you anymore...Who goes to teachers' college these days? Someone who isn't able to get another certificate in higher education or who failed there...".* Once again, the judgement of others appears to be important.

In the retrospective dimension, there is finally the **task perception**: the way teachers give content to their job. What's my job as a teacher? The answer acts as a personal programm and as a norm to evaluate the own professional behaviour. The quality of the relationship with the pupils and the strive for professional (didactical) competence are of crucial importance. Teachers formulate their task largely in terms of classroom activities. When other participants (school leader, colleagues or parents) are mentioned, it is to stress their own professional autonomy in the classroom. E.g. cooperation with colleagues, understood as mutual exchange of ideas, materials or experiences is valued, but *"The way you do things in your classroom, that's your responsability. In this a teacher should be left free. No one should meddle with that. As a teacher, you must have the chance to develop your own style" (Kris).* Parallel careers also play their role in this. Nadine: when one starts the career *"I think that one has more energy and takes more personal initiatives. But once I got married, I've tried to cope with household and teaching and that's enough, I think".* She therefore is not motivated to take in-service training or to engage herself in the school as a whole. For eight respondents in-service training and positive attitude to educational innovations weren't part of the task perception. On both aspects Leo is an illustrative exception.
When examining the evolution of the task perception, the themes of stability and refusal of extra-demands to the job recurred. But at the same time, teachers report that they perceive their job developing from pure transmission of knowledge to more "pedagogical work": paying more attention to and supporting the social-emotional well-being of the children; understanding their personal problems and trying to take care ...Here teachers see themselves forced to take over tasks that previously were part of the education by the parents.

The **future perspective** or the prospective dimension in teachers' professional self contains teachers' expectations for the future development of their job situation and the way they feel about this. Here also the tendency to the status quo is dominating. But the respondents also anticipated on possible problems: decrease in physical condition, growing difficulties to exercise authority. Several respondents said they hoped they would be able to stop teaching the moment they couldn't do the job properly anymore, without being forced (e.g.for financial reasons) to go on. In that case they foresee a very low self esteem and that's something they want to avoid.

This conceptual differentiation admits a more refined and in-dept-understanding of teachers' self and the way it influences their professional behaviour. The interwovenness of self image, self esteem, job motivation and task perception is tersely formulated and illustrated by Leo in the metaphorical statement: *"I never and nowhere want to be a grey mouse"*. It is the red thread that gives coherence to his career story and is the key to understand it.[5]

Before we explore the subjective educational theory, it is important to present some general interpretations about the professional self.
A recurring theme in the career stories, but also in the analysis of the professional selves is that teachers perceive themselves as quite **vulnerable** to the outside world. This (perceived) vulnerability takes several forms. At the start of the career teachers feel to be at the mercy of the school board. As long as they do not get their lifelong assignment, they are defenceless against decisions or instructions of the board. This was still enforced through the importance of "good words" and mediation to get such an assignment. The respondents told about the extra community services (e.g. leading the parish choir, engaging in local associations) that were demanded to get a job or about the kinship relations that were used for this purpose. The stories showed that these were common practices and that they are often implicitly accepted by the respondents as "normal". But for those who had no personal "advocates" this causes problems, as was illustrated in Leo's career.
The vulnerability however also exists in a more general and more subtile form. Teachers feel very vulnerable against the judgement of the outside world. They feel permanently observed and judged by others (e.g. school leader, colleagues and certainly parents). This explains why the respondents spontaneously and amply thematised classroom authority (keeping order and silence; making the pupils obey...). Authority is a very visible aspect of the job, since the teacher has to show it outside his classroom (at the playground during the breaks; when entering the building with the kids, etc.). The study results of the pupils function in an analoguous way. Teachers are concerned about these results, since making the children learn is an important aim in their task perception. But at the seem time, teachers evaluate themselves by these results (self esteem, job motivation). The experience of efficacy (having impact on the pupils' results) is very important to their self esteem. But on the other hand, these results constitute only one element in teachers' task perception. Establishing a good personal relationship with the kids (conceived of as a crucial condition for good learning) is perceived as equally important. But for the outside world, teachers' compentence mainly (and almost exclusively) becomes visible in the study results of the children. Teachers therefor feel themselves evaluated exclusively on that basis. This is a double source of frustration. On the one hand, teachers see these results as reflecting only one part of their job. On the other hand, teachers realise that their real impact on the results is limited, since they are determined by a lot of other factors. So being judged exclusively on the basis of their pupils results is experienced as a double injustice and teachers feel very defenceless to do something against it. When the pupils' results are used moreover by the school leader as an indication of a teacher's professional quality, the frustration becomes very high.
These findings conform the results of the work Blase did on teachers' micropolitical perspectives (Blase, 1988). Micropolitics here refers to the complex power relations in schools: the way people influence others to defend themselves against others or to proactively influence them. He observed that teachers' tendency to passivity and conservatism increased when the experienced vulnerability grew. Our study helps understanding the determinants of this perceived vulnerability.

This also shows that **coping with the inherent limitations of one's impact on pupils' results** (causal attribution), is a permanent task for teachers throughout their career. During the career this attribution process develops from internal to external attribution. Teachers get to understand that their impact is limited and that they can't, nor should feel personally fully responsible for the results. The task is to find a good balance between personal ambitions, aspirations and aims on the one hand and the actual limits of one's impact on the other hand. Overestimating the personal impact leads to unrealistic aims, disappointment and demotivation (sometimes even physical and psychic break downs, as is reported by two respondents). Underestimating the impact results in negative self esteem and demotivation, especially when this is negatively confirmed by the decrease in social status of the job.

Finally we want to emphasize the importance of conceiving of professional self always as **"professional self-in-context"**. The inspectors, the school leader, colleagues, parents etc. constitute the professional environment in

[5] The metaphor also is an example of what Elbaz (1981, p.50 e.v.) and Connelly & Clandinin (1984,p.147 and 1988, p.70) call "images": powerfull metaphorical statements in which feelings, beliefs and insights on the one hand are combined with normative ideas about "good teaching" on the other (See also Huberman, 1985, p.256).

which a teacher operates, acts and develops his professional behaviour. The career stories further clearly show that the relevant "context" for the teachers also includes the *private world* of family e.g. This private sphere (household, raising one's children) "bounds" the commitment to the job for the female teachers, as we described above. We already mentioned the impact of parenthood (see above; also Huberman et al., 1989; Kelchtermans, forthcoming). In the school experiences of their own children teachers come to see how the children themselves actually experience the day-to-day life in school. These experiences often function as a kind of "mirror" that open up teachers' eyes for the unintended side-effects of their professional behaviour (teaching style; authority; relationship etc.). This is clearly showed by a fragment of Leo's story (that at the same time illustrates what we mean by critical incidents). Leo's daughter appeared to have learning difficulties at school. Leo: *"I've always said, since K. was in grade one: in fact, every teacher should have a son or daughter with learning problems. I know this sounds a bit crude (...) but only then I realised what I actually was doing to the children as a teacher, with things such as homework, and lessons to learn ...How exhausted children can be when arriving at home. I didn't had any idea of all this before then (...) Or how depressed children can be because of school. I didn't have the slightest idea about those things before...how should I? Well, and if you only have kids who are doing well at school, you'll never get an idea of it. But that experience definitly influenced my teaching, it certainly determined the way I use homework, the way I handle tests..Yes, absolutely."* His daughter's experiences revealed to Leo the unintended side-effects of his common practices in school. He became conscious about certain domains of the children's life world he didn't paid much attention to until then. This insight initiated a reflective process that made Leo modify certain aspects of his classroom practice. K.'s learning problems appeared only after Leo's years as a remedial teacher. So he did have sufficient technical knowledge on learning difficulties and remedial teaching, but his daughter's experience made him see other dimensions of the problem, e.g. the impact on children's emotional development, self esteem, motivation etc.

THE SUBJECTIVE EDUCATIONAL THEORY

Above we defined subjective educational theory as the personal system of knowledge and believes a teacher uses while doing his job. It is a personally ("subjective") ordered Gestalt ("theory") of knowledge and beliefs that are relevant for education and teaching ("educational").[6] The subjective educational theory results out of the experiences a teacher has during his career and the way he more or less reflectively integrates them. Several authors -a.o. from the "teacher thinking"-research- tried to analyse and structure this knowledge system (e.g. Shulman, 1986; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988 and Elbaz, 1981). Recently more pleas are held to conceive of teachers' knowledge as narrative knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Elbaz, 1990). As Elbaz states: "'story' is that which most adequately constitutes and presents teachers' knowledge" (Elbaz, 1990, p.32). These authors also argue that narrative is the organizing principle in teachers' knowledge. People are "storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative, therefor is the study of the ways humans experience the world" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.2; also Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). Nespor and Barylske believe that the reflectively thematizing by teachers of their professional knowledge -in a research context- can best be understood as a "narrative discours". The stories that are thus presented should not be seen as reflecting specific mental processes (cognitions), but rather as instruments to respresent reality as it is experienced (Nespor & Barylske, 1991, p.806-807).
Butt and his colleagues emphasize the autobiographic character of teachers' knowledge. An adequate conception of teachers' knowledge will reveal the deeper roots of this knowledge in the person's past experiences. It also shows how a subjective educational theory develops and is used by the teacher. According to them this implies a biographical approach, that conceives of the subjective educational theory as "grounded in, and shaped by the stream of experiences that arose out of person/context interactions and existential responses to those experiences. This knowledge and predispositions to act in a particular way at this moment (...) is autobiographic in character" (Butt et al., 1988, p.151).

The stance we took in our study matches these argumentations for a narrative and biographical approach. From the pilot studies we learned that a conception of teachers' knowledge should always include the interwovenness of that subjective theory with the self conception. It became clear that subjective educational theory and professional self are two connected fields of a larger interpretive framework that is used by the teacher to create meaning. In terms of our conceptual framework we could say that the subjective educational theory

[6] Other authors use the terms "implicit theories" (e.g. Clark & Peterson, 1986) or "personal practical knowledge" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988 and 1990). Our notion comes close to the latter, but we wanted to emphasize the structured character of the knowledge system.

contains the knowledge and beliefs that are used by the teacher to implement the personal professional programm implied in the task perception. We believe that the narrative character of the career story therefor is an interesting database to start a reconstruction of professional self and subjective educational theory, since in the story we keep in view the link with the professional self and the biographical (historical) context in which the subjective educational theory was developed. The fragment about the learning difficulties of Leo's daughter (see above) illustrates this.
In another fragment this is made even more clear. It also shows the specific narrative character (dialogue; dramatic scene). Once again K.'s experiences are the immediate cause: *"my oldest daughter, when she was in grade 2, had a teacher who wrote rather negative comments in the children's excercise-books. And my daughter really suffered from that. It was terrible for her, even then in grade2 (This happened six years ago; K. is 14 years old now). And now -when we happen to speak about that teacher- she only says:'Oh, that bitch!'. That's her first reaction, even now, after all these years. (...) You can imagine how such things remain in one's mind..."(II21).*
Through this narrative fragment, Leo describes and argues for his opinion about the way a teacher should give feedback to the children. The opinion is described by narratively sketching the opposite approach and to show the fatal consequences of it for children. The strong and very negative words K. uses when referring at her former teacher, support the implicit argumentation in the story, for they give an idea of how pervasive and lasting the impact of negative feedback can be for children. This way they constitute a strong negative argument in favor of a constructive approach of feedback, as is defended by Leo. Leo spends quite some time in writing individualized constructive comments on the children's work. When he wants to illustrate how serious his "career break down" was (after being removed as remedial teacher) he chooses exactely this example: at that time he neglected the formulation of these feedback-comments; he didn't put any energy in finding "the right words" for every pupil (I33).

The fragments show the link between biographical experiences, subjective educational theory and the professional behaviour. The deep (often symbolical) significance of the idea or principle of practice (i.e. "constructive, personalized and respectful treatment of children is of great importance for their learning and well-being") can only be understood from the narrative context in which it is embedded. These examples (that are exemplary for many others in the career stories) confirm the value of a narrative approach. The subjective educational theory, as reconstructed out of the career stories, was formulated in the **form** of principles of practice (narrative anecdotes) or images (metaphors) (see above Leo's: "never and nowhere being a grey mouse).

With Elbaz we agree that the **content** of the subjective educational theory can only be reconstructed in a fragmentary way (Elbaz, 1990, p.36-37). One never gets the whole picture. Not only because it changes with new experiences, but also because the teacher per definition has no conscious access to his entire "theory"[7]. Further the reconstruction is bounded by the reflective capacity of the teacher and to the degree he is willing to share his ideas with someone else. With these restrictions in mind, we analysed the career stories looking for elements of the subjective educational theory and linking them continuously to their biographical "sources" (specific experiences during the career). The fragments of the subjective educational theory mentioned in the stories almost exclusively refer to the micro level of classroom work, and more specifically to the quality of the personal relationship with the children on the one hand and pedagogical-didactical competence on the other. Several respondents emphasized the importance of a relation of trust with the children as an important condition for good learning results. Another theme that was often mentioned (and connected to that of the relation quality) are ideas on authority.[8] Recurring pedagogical-didactical themes were: the conception of lessons (selecting and structuring curriculum content), handling the formal curriculum, coping with the variance in ability among the children and establishing a differentiated teaching practice; critical reflections about the grade-system.
As sources for this knowledge and beliefs about the relationship with children, teachers referred to their own experiences in their childhood and school time and their parenthood.[9] The most important sources mentioned

[7] The same is true for the professional self! (see Note 2).

[8] We refer here to the comments on teachers' vulnerability above.

[9] This is a confirmation of what Lortie calls "apprenticeship-of-observation" (Lortie, 1975, p.81) and it corroborates the conclusion of certain authors in the teacher-socialisation -research (Knowles, 1992, p.147; Petty & Hogben, 1980, p.59; Zeichner & Gore, 1990, p.334), that one's own experiences as pupil and student have a greater impact on one's actual professional behaviour as a teacher, than has teacher education.

for the didactical competence were: the education at teachers' college (presumed that the knowledge gathered there had "survived" the confrontation with the reality of the classroom practice and proved usefull). Colleagues and school leader only come into play when teachers saw themselves confronted with problems they couldn't solve by themselves. The craftmenship of older colleagues then compensates for the lack of professional experience of the (beginning) teacher. But this exchange and collaboration should not be overestimated, since teachers rely in the first place on their own "reflective experience" as source for their professional behaviour. This becomes more important during the career, parallel to the growing sense of professional competence and efficacy (self esteem; task perception).

An interesting further question is: *how is the subjective educational theory "grounded" by the teacher?* How are that knowledge and beliefs **legitimated** for? Throughout the career stories it became clear that teachers use what Doyle & Ponder (1977-1978) called a "practicality ethic": instructional techniques, curriculum, practical suggestions, pedagogical principles (and their operationalisation), innovations and so on are judged on their value for the classroom. The experience by the teacher that "it works" is the most important criterium to include them in the subjective educational theory. Whether or not a new element is accepted in the subjective educational theory and in professional behaviour is further determined by its match with the already established practice (congruence) and by its cost in extra time and effort to spend by the teacher (Doyle & Ponder, 1977-1978).
Apart from this pragmatic argument to legitimate one's subjective educational theory, teachers also often refer to "authorities": colleagues, school leaders or inspectors who plea for certain practices and are considered as aknowledged authorities ("if he says so, you can belief it"). These authorities are often also critical persons for the respondent. When they are mentioned as having had an influence on the teacher's professional behaviour, this influence is argued implicitly by referring to the authority of the person. His authority gives legitimation for one's practice. For example: a school leader is referred to as the source for certain insights or practices, and in the same narrative fragment depicted as a very competent and highly valued professional. This is argued by referring to his participation in curriculum comittees or research projects from a university or articles published by him in journals and so on. Short, the man gets the statute of an authority in the field.

Here we can also make a link with teachers' **professionalism**. Our analysis supports the idea that teachers are "craftsmen" rather than "professionals". Only a very limited part of their professional knowledge is technical (one of the distinctive characteristics of a profession). To a certain degree teachers understand the technical structure of e.g. the methods or manuals they use. Most of that knowledge is what Pratte and Rury call "embodied (experiential) knowledge", that is typical for the "craft professions" (Pratte & Rury, 1991, p.61-63): teachers' subjective educational theory is developed mainly by reflection on classroom practices. A consequence of this (and more important than the discussion whether teaching is a profession or not) is that this experiential character of teachers' knowledge constitutes another element of vulnerability. The knowledge base refers to practicality and "authorities", and doesn't has the power of e.g. "scientific" knowledge. This makes it a weak base to defend certain practices when (legitimately or not) questionned or critisized by others, e.g. parents or school leader. Teachers can only rely on reflective experience, intuïtion and their personal commitment in trying to defend one's practice and convince the others of its value. This, once again, often enhances their feeling of vulnerability.

DISCUSSION: THE BIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In our study we tried to give content to the general concept of "professional development" by reconstructing teachers' professional self and subjective educational theory from the career stories as indicators for that development. We believe that the study showed the usefulness of the biographical perspective for a better understanding of why teachers are acting the way they do. This approach demonstrates the way teachers experience their careers themselves, the way they make sense of the unnumerous events and experiences during the career and integrate them in their personal teaching style.
At the start of our study we hoped that the procedure for stimulated autobiographic selfthematisation would at the same time function as a means for professional development in the prescriptive sense (making "better teachers"). We explored this in the final interview by asking the respondents to reflect on how they had experienced the research procedure, and more specifically the stimulated and systematic reflection on their past. The results however showed that stimulated reflection on the career and the personal development as such did not automatically change or improve the teachers' teaching practice. But the respondents did report what we called an "enhanced selfawareness" and a more systematic reflection on themselves as teachers. They emphasized that the interviewsituation, with an interested listener who stimulated the reflection by his questions,

was a necessary condition. By themselves they almost never came to this kind of reflection, since the day-to-day-practice doesn't contain any need for it. The opportunities for (prescriptive) professional development (but also teacher education and in-service training) should be explored in further (action) research.
So, every teacher is a teacher, but every teacher has his or her own professional biography and therefore every teacher is not just a teacher like any other teacher.

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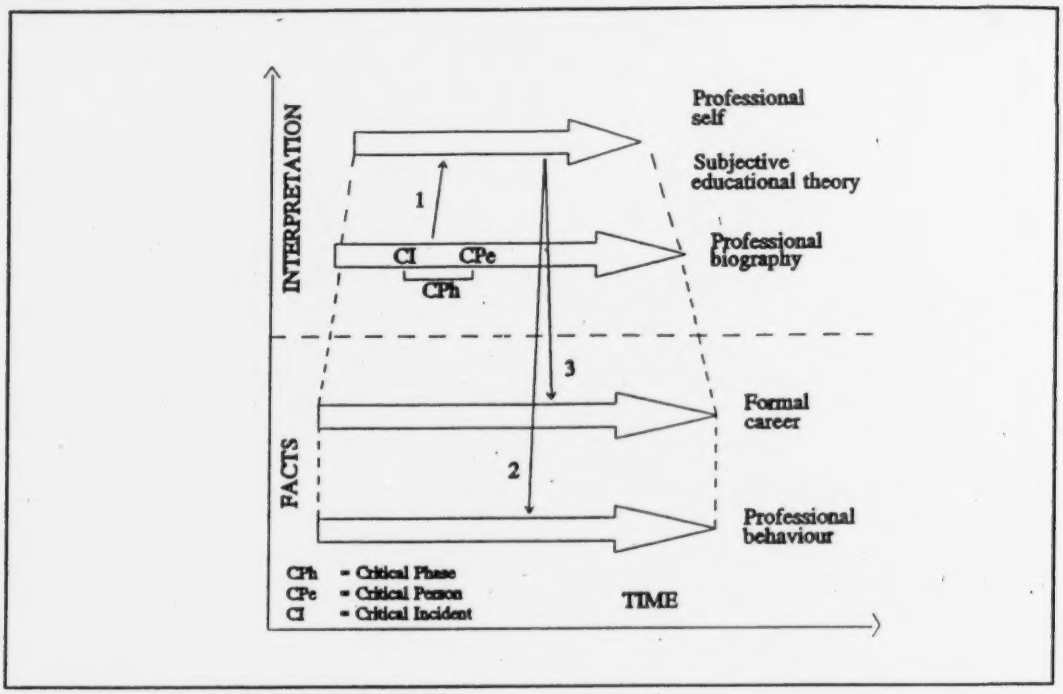

Figure 1 : The conceptual framework

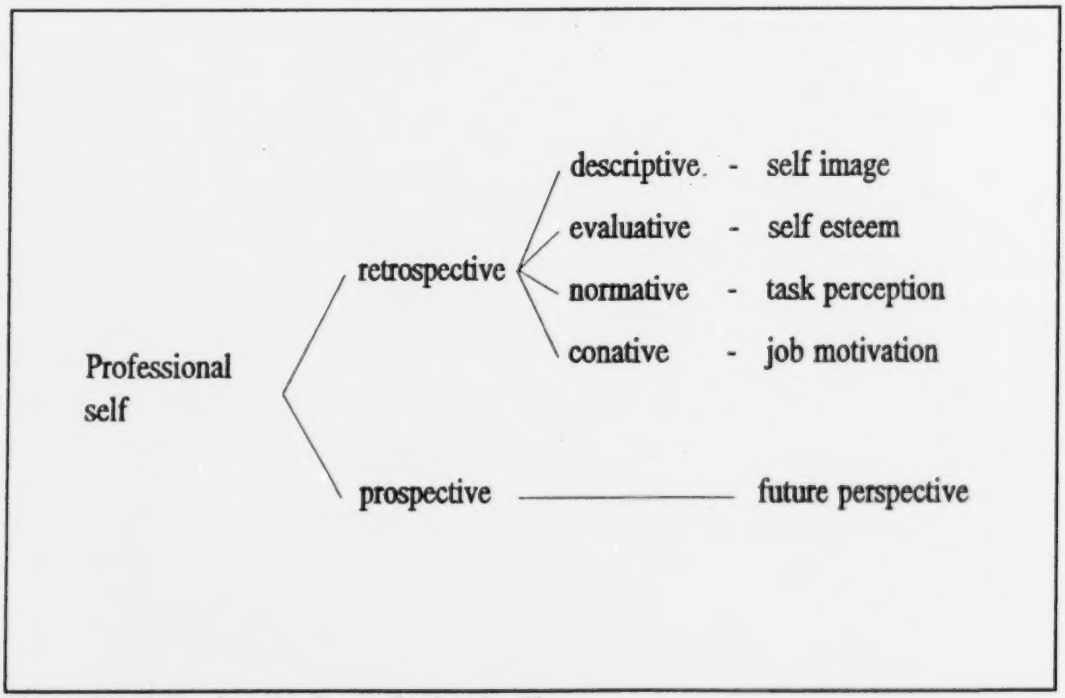

Figure 2. Dimensions in the professional self